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ABSTRACT

This teacher-addressed discussion of parent involvement programs at the elementary school level explains why and how parents can aid teachers in classroom processes, and provides guidelines for planning, implementing, and evaluating a program at the community level. It is suggested that planning for parent involvement requires a preliminary teacher workshop (setting goals, defining roles, and establishing program policies), and a parent-teacher workshop (defining student-directed focus, program needs, and activities). Actual parent involvement entails making individual plans, contacting volunteers, and encouraging participation. With the completion of these preliminary tasks, parent orientation to the program must be performed (including an examination of the school physical plant, explaining parent role, pupil characteristics, classroom methods and materials, basic parent-behavior guidelines, and integration of the parent-volunteers into the classroom routine). General suggestions for program evaluation, activities for parents, and topics for the parent-teacher workshop are provided. Three essays on parent-volunteer programs are appended. (MJB)

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Parent Involvement in the Schools

G. john Berclay, editor

Reference & Resource Series

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INTRODUCTION

Two centuries ago John Adams wrote, "The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people, and must be willing to bear the expense of it." The words are direct and uncomplicated. Indeed, it is inviting to think that education in that time was much simpler than it is now, and that the expense, therefore, was much less. The educational task that we face now seems to be a much more complex one, so complex in fact that John Adams' wisdom seems scarcely to apply. But we delude ourselves if we think that those words have no relevance today.

When our country was founded, education was one of the few safeguards against the unknown future. As a group of isolated colonies with dependent economies and leaders inexperienced in national government, our early communities had no certainty that they could survive as a country. In many respects their future was as dark as that our world faces in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Now that we are a vast, strong, and rich world power, it seems more than ever necessary for us to pay heed to John Adams' words. The shadows of future global problems demand the knowledge and foresight that can only come from the education of the whole people. And for that we must turn to a comprehensive and flexible system of education. The schools, which belong to all of us as John Adams hoped they would, are our best guide into the unknown. The expense we must bear for them is not simply one of dollars. It is, in addition, an expense of concern, and time, and active care.

Official figures tell us that three out of every ten persons in the United States are directly involved in education. We often assume that three out of ten are enough to do the job well. We often believe that the schools are the sole territory of those persons directly involved in education, and that the participation of other members of the community might be viewed from inside the school as interference.

The truth is that our schools need our care, and taking care of a school is more than removing trash and repairing broken equipment and replacing damaged instructional materials. It involves a maintenance of spirit among students and teachers and other school personnel. That spirit, which we often call morale—as if we were an army facing a long season of trench warfare—in turn flows back to us and to all the other members of our community. At a time when the public educational system is threatened by those forces that would establish private schools to exclude minority students from an equal education, it is imperative that we maintain that spirit. The divisive action of a few strikes at the heart of the premises of equality and equal opportunity on which our democracy is based, and if we permit it to erode our public school system, we indeed jeopardize the education of the whole people.

If all of us do not concern ourselves with the schools, we are forfeiting some of the responsibility we share for our country's future. An active, well planned and carefully implemented parent involvement program can help all of us in working together toward the future.

WHY PARENTS SHOULD BE INVOLVED

A child's initial learning experiences take place in the home, with parents as the first instructors. As the child's world expands, other persons—relatives, family friends, other children, and those present through books, radio, television, and movies—play an important part in learning. As these other sources of learning become evident, parents may begin to feel they are losing contact with their child, and this feeling can become especially acute when the child enters school.

Many parents experience the loss of shared activities with a child not because they are no longer interested but because they do not feel involved in the school situation. Though some parents try to counteract this—as indicated by the growing number of cooperative nursery schools in which parents take part in the child's learning and share in her/his growth—the doors of the elementary school are often closed to parent participation. Parents too often find they can do little in cooperation with the school and the teacher, except perhaps provide refreshments for a holiday party or help chaperone the class picnic.

Since the school and the parents share concern for the welfare of the child, it is logical that they should develop a cooperative partnership. Creating such a partnership is the purpose of the parent involvement program—an exciting concept designed to bring parents into the classroom where they can actively take part in the education of their child. With the growing emphasis on individualized or personalized instruction, you will find there are many opportunities for parents to participate in activities which do not require the professional expertise of the teacher—but which do utilize the skills or interests parents have and do provide an enriched learning experience for the children. The parent involvement program does not attempt to replace teachers, substitute teachers, or auxiliary personnel with parents, but it can supplement and enrich their efforts with parent assistance.

Although the primary aim of the parent involvement program is to broaden the learning opportunities of each student through increased personal attention and support, there are also advantages for the teacher, the school, and the parents. The teacher has more time to devote to the professional aspects of teaching and is able to learn more about individual students; the school is able to obtain skills and services from parents which might not otherwise be available; and the parents are able to share in their child's development and to enrich their own lives through meaningful contributions to their community. As communication between home and school increases, parents are able to learn more about, and thus come to support, the school and its programs, while school and teacher gain important information about the community and its residents.

The following discussion of such a parent involvement program—in this case at the elementary level—shows you why and how parents can aid you as a teacher, and provides guidelines for planning, implementing, and evaluating a successful program in your own community.

PLANNING FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

No matter who initiates your parent involvement effort—teachers, parents, principals, administrators, parent organizations, local education associations, or boards of education—your local program will probably require certain advance approvals. After these basic approvals of the parent volunteer concept are received, careful planning for each program stage is essential. If your board of education or other local body must authorize such a program, keep it informed of your progress at all times—not just during the planning stage but also after your program is in effect.

THE PRELIMINARY TEACHER WORKSHOP

To be a success, your parent involvement program must have the support of teacher, principal, and administrator; to give this support, they must recognize why and where parents involvement can help them, and they must feel that it is their program. A series of workshops—including teachers, principal, and administrators—will allow participants to define their need for parent involvement, examine ways to develop a sound approach to collaborative education, and participate in the design and implementation of a truly local program.

Setting Your Goals

The two-part filmstrip *Parents and Teachers Together (for the Benefit of Children)*, a comprehensive introduction to parent involvement, will stimulate discussion and other planning activities by providing a basic orientation to the program. From the filmstrip it is evident that the parent involvement program should aim to—

- Meet the needs of individual students more fully, making the educational program more flexible and thus more student-oriented through increased personal attention and assistance.
- Develop a cooperative partnership between parent and teacher for the benefit of the student.
- Enlist and strengthen parent cooperation with the school, which will increase parent support of the school and its programs.
- Create an environment which encourages two-way communication between home and school.
- Give teachers more time for professional activities, making them more effective teachers and creating a more manageable teaching role.
- Encourage experimentation with new techniques such as team teaching and with new learning materials—which might not be possible for the school without volunteer assistance.
- Encourage parent and school examination of current testing and evaluation practices to see how these might be improved.
- Provide a continuous public relations feeder system from the school through the parents to the community to create greater understanding of educational needs and goals, and to form a cultural bridge in a multiethnic setting.
- Allow parents to make a significant contribution to their children, their schools, and their community.

A discussion of these overall goals will provide useful perspectives in setting objectives for your local program. Only with specific aims in mind can you give your program needed direction and evaluate its progress. By stimulating thought about parent involvement and its purposes, the Parent Involvement Series booklet *Discussion-Starter Questions for Parents and Teachers* should also prove useful in your planning.

First, review the needs and goals of your local school—possibly through large- or small-group discussions or panels. Such analyses will help you determine the areas in which parent involvement can be of real assistance. To fulfill its potential, parent involvement must be an integral part of the school situation, and this is the time to determine how and where it can help your pupils the most. You, the teacher, must know why you want the help of volunteers.

Parents' goals are important, too, and the program should be in line with these to prevent confusion among your pupils. Though parents and teachers both want the best for students, they may differ on the ways to achieve this goal.

Defining the Parent Role

Once you have decided where the program is going, turn your attention to how to get there. Workshop participants should assess all teacher activities to see which are professional and must be performed by a teacher (e.g., diagnosing needs, prescribing programs, initiating activities, presenting content, counseling, evaluating students), and which are nonprofessional and may be carried out by volunteers (e.g., providing general assistance and support, handling clerical duties, monitoring activities, motivating students, reinforcing instruction). And this type of analysis has an added benefit—it gives teacher, principal, and administrator a chance to examine the educational process as a whole, which may point up a need for improvement having nothing to do with the parent involvement program.

These nonprofessional activities will provide the framework for the parent volunteer role, which must be defined in such a way that it will be understood by all who will be actively involved—teachers, parents, paid paraprofessionals and students. But avoid making this role so rigid or limited that it prevents growth and development as the teacher and the parent volunteers interact in the classroom setting. Flexibility should be a major characteristic of your program so that activities fit the needs of your school, your classroom, and your individual students.

Perhaps the best way to decide what specific activities fall within the scope of the parent volunteer role is through a brainstorming session. Clerical duties such as taking attendance or collecting and recording lunch money will probably come to mind first. But with a little thought and imagination you can find many other ways parents can enrich the learning environment—such as making educational games or collecting resource materials for you. List all the ideas generated in your own workshop, for these are the activities that probably have the most relevance to your situation and your needs. Then, consult the list of suggested activities on page 27 for other ideas. No school can assign to parents all the activities we mention, nor would it want to—particularly in a new program. These are merely suggestions to supplement your own ideas and to stimulate planning.

Professional and educational standards, of course, must be maintained. Parents should provide motivation for their children, encourage receptivity to learning, and help their children establish good self-images and self-confidence. But planning and carrying out the instructional program remains the responsibility of each teacher.

If there are paid paraprofessionals, or auxiliary personnel working in your school, guidelines should be developed for efficient cooperation between them and the parents. Conflicting functions and responsibilities will cause misunderstandings, thus weakening the parent involvement program and causing personnel difficulties. The two groups may be completely separate in their duties, or they may be woven together—for example, a paid paraprofessional might serve as a coordinator for the parent volunteer effort.

The characteristics of your community will also influence your planning with regard to the role of the volunteer and the extent of your program. Therefore, if your community has a high percentage of working parents, or non-English-speaking parents, or parents hostile to the school system, this will affect the number of volunteers you can expect and the jobs they will be able to perform. If it appears there will not be many volunteers initially, consider expanding your program to include grandparents or retired persons, or plan for limited volunteer assistance in only a few specific activities.

Writing careful job descriptions for volunteers will help everyone involved and cut down on the time needed for training. These descriptions should indicate what activities the volunteer will participate in, how many students each volunteer will work with and at what grade level, what materials will be used, what training will be needed, and when each volunteer will work, including the number of sessions. For example, one such description might call for a parent volunteer to work on arithmetic skills, using a certain instructional method, for one hour twice a week for six weeks with four students in a particular third-grade class,

after the parent has attended a school orientation and a two-hour training session. In this way, teachers can find volunteers to meet very specific needs, and parents will know what is expected of them and be able to volunteer for work which interests them.

After determining the activities parents will participate in, assess the effect of parent involvement on your school program as a whole. You will have more time for planning and for experimenting with new teaching methods if parents help prepare the learning materials essential to such new approaches. Having parent volunteers may mean that the library or the audiovisual center can be open longer or offer more services. The school health program or counseling service may be expanded. There may be opportunities for more after-school activities, such as hobby or science clubs. All these new possibilities have implications for educational planning which go far beyond the parent involvement program.

Considering All the Viewpoints

As with most new ideas, there will be apprehension about the value of the parent involvement program. Following are some of the doubts or objections which may be voiced by workshop participants:

- Planning activities for volunteers will take too much time.
- Teachers will not be comfortable with parents in the classroom.
- The use of parents in instructional activities may lower the school's or the teacher's educational standards.
- Teachers will be subject to frequent parent criticism.
- The use of parent volunteers may mean that the school system will hire fewer certificated teachers than are really needed.
- Parents will try to take over teaching responsibilities.
- Parents may not follow a teacher's instructions or the school's regulations.
- Parents will disrupt the classroom and cause confusion.
- Parents may discuss confidential school information with their friends.
- Parents may not keep their volunteer commitment, creating scheduling difficulties.
- Parents may not know how to work productively with students.

While no one can predict what situations will arise, these and other problems must be considered at the outset. Workshop participants may not have definite solutions for these situations, and information from outside sources may help. The taped comments and discussions in *Talk . . . About Parent Involvement,* also included in the Parent Involvement Series, will give you information about the very real benefits—and some of the problems—you may expect to experience in operating a parent involvement program. The first side of the cassette covers "What a Parent Involvement Program Can (and Can't) Do for Your School"; the second side presents comments from educators who are actually participating in existing programs in "I'm Involved in Parent Involvement."

School representatives may also want to contact or visit schools with active programs to see what difficulties were encountered and how they were handled. Such contacts may also yield valuable tips for planning and carrying out your program.

Remember that "experience is the best teacher"—handling a problem situation is usually easier when you are actually faced with it. Too many hypothetical "if's" and "but's" now may cause your supporters to wonder whether the program has too many drawbacks. Many other teachers have felt similar doubts about bringing parents into the classroom, and to their delight, they have found that parents are more interested in helping students than in criticizing the teachers; that they may have many good ideas for improving the school's programs; that they can work well with teachers and follow their instructions; and that they are, in fact, good teachers.

However, the program must be acceptable to all those who will be involved, and the parent involvement approach may not be best for everyone. If a teacher does not want parent volunteers, she/he should not be forced to have them in the classroom. In the future, if the program works for other teachers, a reluctant teacher may be willing to become involved—a possibility to keep in mind when

planning the extent of your initial program and its later expansion.

Establishing Program Policies

Although final planning for parents will be done by each individual teacher, there are some basic policies which should be determined by teachers, principal, and administrators together.

Time Limits: First, decide when to begin your program. The initial teacher planning is best done during the summer or several weeks after school has opened to allow for adequate preparation. There must also be sufficient time for orienting and training parents, and if volunteers are contacted after school has been in session for a while, they will have a better idea of how much free time they have to devote to volunteer work.

Also set a completion date for the first phase of your program. A vague call for volunteers for an open-ended project will produce few responses; parents want to know how much of a commitment they are expected to make. Your *initial* phase should not extend over a long period—but be sure that it is long enough to accomplish at least short-term goals, such as providing learning materials for a specific instructional unit. This not only helps you plan your classroom schedule, but it also permits early evaluation and modification if the program is running into difficulties. Parents who do not work well in a particular classroom situation can be phased out or transferred without embarrassment, and parents who find they do not have enough time can leave the program without feeling they are disrupting your curricular plans.

Program Scope: While each teacher must determine how many volunteers can be used in the class, workshop participants should decide whether all teachers who want parent volunteers will have them or whether some classrooms will be selected as "pilots." You should also determine whether beginning teachers will have volunteers and whether parents will be used by other school personnel, such as librarians or counselors.

School Facilities: When you have an approximate idea of the size of your program, check to see that your school's facilities are adequate. For example, chairs designed for six-year-olds will not be suitable for parents, and you may have to do some furniture rearranging. Volunteers also need their own work areas and materials—either in your classroom or elsewhere. Specific areas should be set aside where parents can prepare instructional materials and the like. Parents will need a definite place to keep their personal belongings, and as your program grows, a lounge for parent volunteers will be appreciated.

Volunteer Requirements: The basic qualifications for a parent volunteer are interest in education and the community, a desire to help, dependability, commitment to the program, enjoyment of children, and good health. However, you may want to add other requirements, ask for references, or screen potential volunteers, particularly if you plan to use them in tutorial or remedial programs. This screening should serve only to provide a basis for assigning responsibilities and not for rejecting those who wish to help; there is always a place for every interested parent to make a contribution.

You might decide to ask volunteers to sign some type of statement of commitment, indicating that they will work for a certain period of time, that they will undergo necessary orientation and training, that they will adhere to school regulations, and so forth. This will put your program on a more businesslike level and remind both parents and teachers of their mutual commitment.

Record Keeping: Arranging a system for parent volunteers to sign in and out at the school office is helpful if parents need to be contacted during their working hours. Parents also may be asked to keep individual time cards; if you have a record of how much volunteer assistance you have received, you can better assess your results and the effectiveness of your tilization of volunteers. At this point, you may want to set up a committee to develop forms and other materials relating to the volunteer program, including application forms, time sheets, information records, and evaluation questionnaires.

Classroom Assignment: One area of concern is whether or not a parent will work in the classroom with his or her own child. Usually this will not create problems and, in fact, may encourage more parents to come into the school by making them feel more comfortable. The school may wish to establish a policy on this or leave the decision to the teacher involved. One of the benefits of the program is the increased sharing of experiences by parent and child; but if the student expresses

resentment of the parents' attention to other students in the class, or if you feel parents would interfere in your instruction of their children, the situation is best avoided. Each parent will still become familiar with the types of experiences her/his child has, even in another classroom, and this will lead to greater communication and understanding between them.

Special Training: If parents will be participating in special education activities—assisting remedial reading teachers or speech therapists, for example—they may need extra instruction beyond the parent orientation session discussed later. Advance arrangements should be made for any training requiring outside specialists; if more than one school in your area is using parent volunteers in special education, a training session for all parents at a centralized location in your district will save time and avoid duplication of effort.

Program Control: In planning how you will utilize parents, remember that ultimate control of the parent involvement program, and thus ultimate responsibility for its success or failure, must rest with your principal and with you, the teacher. It is your support and enthusiasm which will inspire parents to make the program work, and it is your guidance which will determine whether you achieve the goals you have set.

THE PARENT-TEACHER WORKSHOP

When your initial planning is completed, parent interest must be generated and maintained. This is best accomplished through a parent-teacher workshop—again with principal and administrators present—at which you can outline your proposed program, answer questions, and assess community reactions which will be useful in the final planning stages. To stimulate interest in volunteer involvement, you might try distributing a leaflet to all parents, indicating the areas in which the school needs help and inviting them to attend your parent-teacher workshop. Posters, developed as part of the Parent Involvement Series to promote your program, can also be displayed in the school and around the community, or you can place a notice in your local newspaper.

Carefully developed workshop plans are essential to an interesting, informative, and well-organized presentation. Your audience will consist of potential volunteers, and the effectiveness of this meeting will determine whether or not you will have the parent support and involvement vital to your success. A suggested workshop format is presented in this book on page 30. Whatever workshop activities you plan, encourage parent-teacher interaction and allow for input from those parents who will ask questions before a large audience as well as from those who are more at home in small-group situations.

Begin your workshop with a viewing of the first part of the filmstrip *Parents and Teachers Together (for the Benefit of Children)*, which stresses the importance of the parent volunteer effort. If a parent involvement program has been in operation previously in your community, show some slides of parents working in your local schools. Supplement this presentation with remarks by principal or teachers as to the direction your local program is taking. Discussion of appropriate questions from *Discussion-Starter Questions for Parents and Teachers* (page 32) should provide a good general background for consideration of the specific issues below. Also, give parents copies of the leaflet *Get Involved in Your Child's School*, one of the components in the Parent Involvement Series, which will answer some of their questions about volunteer involvement.

The Student

The major focus of the parent-teacher workshop should be on the individual student who will benefit from the extra personal attention and the enriched learning program which parent involvement provides. The personal attention a parent gives may well cause a student to realize her/his own worth and ability to achieve. While parents may feel that they will go into the classroom as teacher helpers, stress that—more importantly—they will be student helpers.

The Program

Present the needs and problems of your school fairly and show parents how they can help alleviate undesirable situations such as lack of individualized

attention, mushrooming paper work, or a shortage of curriculum materials. They must understand their value in giving the teacher time to teach. Be prepared, however, to answer those who question the value of parent participation. They may feel that such a project will disrupt the learning situation or that the school spends too much time experimenting with programs when it should get down to the business of teaching—using traditional methods parents are familiar with. These and other issues should be dealt with in an effort to increase communication between parents and school personnel. If parents feel their legitimate concerns are ignored now, they will react negatively to your future efforts.

Activities

Discuss the types of activities being planned for volunteers so parents can see how these coincide with their own skills and interests. Emphasize that there are two types of volunteer work open to parents; the first involves continuing scheduled activities in the school; the second allows parents to participate as resource persons or helpers on a one-time basis for a specific activity, perhaps sharing special experiences, travels, hobbies, skills, or talents. Of course, actual duties will be arranged by the teachers in cooperation with the parents, but they should be given an idea of the variety of opportunities awaiting them at school. Parents should realize that they will not be stuck in a "clerical rut" and that at least part of their time will be spent working directly with the students. Point out special activities for working mothers and fathers so they will see that everyone can help in some way—whether it is directly by working with students or indirectly by helping schedule activities by telephone, making classroom materials at home, or taking an hour from work to record a filmstrip narration.

Parent Commitment

Point out that parents will not be expected to spend a lot of time in the classroom. They will work out their schedules with the teachers they are assisting, and they can spend as little as an hour a month working in the program. Also indicate the length of the program so potential volunteers will know how much of a commitment they must make. Parents should understand that the amount of time they give will not determine your appreciation of their efforts; the contribution of each parent is equally valuable to the students involved.

Volunteer Benefits

Finally, make parents aware of how their assistance will affect their own lives—through sharing with their children, learning more about their educational system, and contributing to their community. The parent involvement program is a learning experience for all who take part.

During your parent-teacher workshop, encourage parents' understanding and support of your program. Stimulate them to want to play an active role in their children's education and to involve parents not attending the workshop. But also seek parent ideas. They must realize that while the school is organizing the program, it is really their program, too—just as the schools are the community's schools. To foster the partnership between parent and teacher, parent ideas and viewpoints must be considered in your planning. Parents may have valuable suggestions on contacting volunteers or on what activities they are prepared to participate in. If parents see that their contributions are welcomed in the planning phase, they will be more willing to support the final product.

After discussing the many aspects of your parent volunteer program, you may want to distribute application forms for parents to fill out and return, indicating what activities they are interested in. In this way, when you are actually ready to implement your plans, you will have a ready pool of volunteers.

TEACHER PREPARATION

Making Individual Plans

At this point, responsibility for final planning and implementation of your parent involvement program shifts to you, the teacher. Analyze the needs of your students to see how volunteers can enrich your specific instructional plans. Then decide how many volunteers you need, how often, and for what activities.

Parent volunteers are usually happier, feel more useful, and are more successful when assigned specific duties. Telling a parent to walk around the room and help anyone who needs it will only create frustration and a sense of not really being needed. The same is true for greeting parents with "My, what am I going to do with you today?" or having them wait around for an hour while you get organized. While making such detailed plans may take extra time how, this will diminish as you learn how and where to involve parents and as they become familiar with the school setting. Also, make an effort to give parents a variety of responsibilities, and allow a certain amount of time for them to work directly with the students. After all, that is why the parents are there, and that is where they will receive the most personal satisfaction from their work.

Whatever instructional plans you make, keep your principal informed at all times so that parent and community questions can be readily answered from the principal's office. By being aware of your plans and activities, the principal will be able to help orient volunteers, have background information necessary to help you solve problems, and see that school guidelines are followed in order to meet your goals.

Contacting Volunteers

The next step is to decide who to invite and how to get in touch with them. It is a good idea first to become familiar with your students and their family situations, as well as with the community as a whole. The more knowledge you have of the community, the better you can utilize its potential resources.

You can begin by contacting parents who have already shown interest in your program, particularly through participation in the parent-teacher workshop. If you are hesitant about having volunteers in your classroom, first try calling one parent whom you already know. However, if you decide to issue a general invitation to all parents by personal note or form letter, enclose a response card for interested parents to fill out and return, providing you with information on what activities they want to participate in, what skills or experience they have to contribute, and when they are available. Again, the Parent Involvement Series posters should be useful in making community residents aware of your program.

Experience has shown that a personal invitation generally brings the best results since parents will respond to your interest and enthusiasm. You can contact your parents at fall registration, school open houses or other social functions, and parent-teacher conferences; by telephone; or during home visits. The latter two have an advantage in that they place parents in a more comfortable setting, whereas the more formal contacts in the school building may inhibit parent-teacher communication. If your program has been in operation for some time, you may have a volunteer coordinator who can contact parents for you. In any case, do not try to involve more parent volunteers than you can adequately plan for and utilize, particularly during your initial phase.

There are several other factors to keep in mind when deciding whom to invite. Do not rely too heavily on parents who are substitute teachers. Though experienced, they may be called to work at the last minute, leaving you without the help you planned for. Caution parents involved in clubs or community service groups to examine their previous commitments carefully; they may find they are spreading themselves over too many activities, and if they have to leave the program later due to lack of time, this will again have an adverse effect on your planning.

Encouraging Participation

However you contact parents, explain the parent involvement program and its purposes, benefits, values, and goals. Indicate your interest in and support of each parent's contributions, no matter how limited. Highlight those aspects of your program which relate to the parents' interests. Encourage them to ask questions, and make them aware of your confidence in them. If you have developed any printed materials (job descriptions, program highlights, calendars of events, newsleters, etc.), distribute these or copies of the leaflet *Get Involved in Your Child's School* to your prospective volunteers. Explain what specific help is needed and what training they will be given to help them feel more confident. Stress that without them there can be no program.

Be prepared to discuss reasons why parents migh not feel they can contribute to your program effort—for example:

- If parents fear the school situation, perhaps due to childhood experiences, they must be reassured of your concern and support. Give special emphasis to the concern for the students which you and the parents share, so they feel you will appreciate their help.
- Some parents may feel that education is the school's job, or they may not agree with your school's methods or programs. Under such circumstances, stress the benefits of parent involvement, and urge communication and observation to bring about new understandings.
- Parents with preschool children may need encouragement to share babysitting chores with other volunteers.
- If transportation is not available, put parents in touch with others to ride with. If you have many volunteers, you might appoint a transportation chairperson to handle these details.
- Those who do not speak English can work with other parents who speak their language, if you do not. Point out that there are areas where they can help and that this would be an excellent opportunity for them to learn English from you and the students.
- Working parents may not realize there are many ways they can become involved. Invite them to spend even an hour or two a month in the classroom and to participate in activities in the evenings and on weekends.
- Parents who feel that they are too busy might be asked to spend short periods of time helping on an irregular basis. In this way, their absence will not disrupt your schedule, and they may find that they really do have the time to be part of such a beneficial program.

When parents volunteer to come into the classroom, stress once more the importance of their keeping the commitment for the length of the program—you will be scheduling activities in light of their promised help, and students will be looking forward enthusiastically to the new experiences they will provide. Remeber, however, that while some parents may leave the program because they do not have the time, others may leave because they are bored, do not feel useful, or do not experience a sense of achievement as a result of their efforts. Volunteers demonstrate their concern and dedication through their efforts to help you and your pupils, and they need your encouragement and inspiration at all times. Parent "dropouts" weaken your overall program, and maintaining parent interest and enthusiasm requires your efforts—particularly in careful planning—as well as theirs.

PARENT ORIENTATION

Your volunteers can make an important contribution to your school—but their effectiveness depends largely on skillful professional guidance and development of their potential. Parents will get acquainted with your school more quickly and become better volunteers if they feel welcome, have your careful guidance, know what is expected of them, have help in developing good relationships with your students, are acquainted with all the information and procedures vital to performing their duties, and are busy and actively involved.

When you have your volunteers, arrange a parent orientation session as soon as possible, again

including your principal. Because there is much material to cover and parents will have questions, you may want to hold several short meetings rather than one marathon session.

Since this session will be the first real contact with the school for many parents, you will want to make a good first impression. Organize the material you must cover in advance and make up an agenda; also notify any speakers so they will be prepared. An agenda sheet or orientation checklist given to the parents will help them follow your presentation. An effective orientation session is essential to laying the groundwork for an effective parent-teacher partnership.

In order to facilitate scheduling, when each parent arrives, she/he should first fill out a card indicating address, telephone number, days and hours available for work, special skills or interests which would be useful in enriching your curriculum, previous work experience (paid or volunteer), and any other information you feel pertinent. If parents are working with only one teacher, these reference cards can be kept in that teacher's classroom. But if parents will rotate among teachers as they are needed or if some will act as resource persons for particular subjects rather than as regular helpers, keep your file of parents' cards where all teachers will have access to it. Remember that any information on volunteers' abilities and talents will help you determine where they will be most useful in your instructional program.

Familiarizing Parents with Your School

While volunteers will be somewhat familiar with your parent involvement program and its goals by this time, a review will be useful. The program will have more meaning for them now in terms of their own behavior, and they may have additional questions. Ask parents what they consider important about what they are doing, and discuss these ideas in terms of your program's goals. Find out what objectives volunteers want to fulfill and gain from their participation, and relate these to the services the school needs.

Parents may also find a brief discussion of the school budget and sources of income, district tax limits, the school system's current and future needs, and the like helpful in understanding the value of the volunteer program. Stressing the importance of each citizen's contribution to the schools will add to their feeling of being needed and appreciated.

The basic philosophy of the school curriculum should be outlined, and any experimental programs or materials which are in use should be explained—by the curriculum director, your principal, or one of the teachers. If parents will be involved in any activity, they should understand the function of that activity in the total educational program.

Acquaint parents with the organizational pattern and schedule of the school, as well as of the classrooms in which they will be working; school attendance requirements; school calendar; behavior and discipline standards; regulations observed in school facilities such as the library, cafeteria, auditorium, and media center, on the playgrounds, and during trips away from school; socioeconomic, cultural, or ethnic composition of the student body; services available to students—e.g., counseling, health care, speech therapy, remedial and tutorial programs, etc.; time cards, sign-in sheets, and other forms volunteers must complete; and accident or emergency policies and procedures. Explain health requirements for parent volunteers and school and teacher liability (as determined by your board of education as well as by state or local laws), along with more basic information on where to park, where to report when they come to the school, arrangements for meals, use of the school phone, and whom to contact if they cannot come when scheduled. This and other information can be typed up as a series of handouts to be placed in a parent volunteer kit, or much of it may already be contained in your school handbook, which you can distribute to parents. If you do not have such a handbook, this would be a good time to develop one—perhaps with volunteer help—to give to new teachers and school visitors in addition to volunteers.

A tour of the school premises will acquaint parents with the location of the library, various offices, supply areas, workrooms, emergency exits, cafeteria, auditorium, gymnasium, and other facilities; parents may find a map of your school layout helpful until they learn their way around. This tour also gives parents a chance to meet all the teachers, librarians, counselors, secretaries, cafeteria workers, custodians, and other school personnel who can assist them. If parents are able to

get to know these people, they will have a better opportunity to become accepted members of the school staff.

Explaining the Parent Role

Outline clearly the role and responsibilities of parents to avoid misunderstandings. Parents must know whom they are accountable to, what channels of communication are open to them, and what limits will be placed on them and why; cover any legal or school policy limitations on the use of non-certificated personnel at this point. Volunteers are there to motivate students, to stimulate their desire to learn, and to assist them, but they are not expected to take over the functions of the teacher. Of course, you must explain this tactfully since some parents may feel qualified to do things which, in reality, require professional expertise which only the teacher possesses.

If parents are aware of how they will be involved initially and whether there will be opportunities to participate in more complex learning activities as they gain skill and confidence, they will be less likely to feel underutilized. Also, if there are paid paraprofessionals working in your school, explain any distinction between paraprofessional and volunteer responsibilities.

A discussion of educational ethics and the parents' responsibility to the school, the student, the program, and the community is particularly appropriate. Parents must understand that they, like the teachers, are bound by professional principles regarding disclosure of any confidential information they may have about teachers or students, political activities in the school, and other sensitive areas. Parents should be aware of the attitudes, appearance, and standards of conduct that are expected of them, both in the school and in the community.

Discussing Pupil Characteristics

With the above background, parents are ready to learn more about what will happen when they actually begin working in the classroom. Have your school psychologist, counselor, pupil personnel worker, or a teacher discuss briefly how young people grow and develop physically, socially, emotionally, and mentally. If parents are to help constructively, they need a grasp of the characteristics of students in the age groups they will work with and of how these students learn. Explain how to recognize physical or behavioral disorders which should be brought to your attention. In addition, make parents aware of how to cope with the many reactions students may have—aggression, indifference, testing, dependence, etc.—to new adults in the classroom.

Of course, it is natural for parents to expect to see young people benefit from their help, and they may look for learning improvements on their own. If they think it is their responsibility to bring about and measure rapid learning advances, they may become disappointed or frustrated if the students do not meet their expectations. Stress that evaluation of student progress is entirely your responsibility and should not be attempted by parents; their function is to inform you regularly of any learning difficulties or achievements they observe in the students they work with, not to interpret these. Pupil learning advances may be small and slow in coming, but they are nonetheless extremely important and can be accurately assessed only by a professional.

Introducing Methods and Materials

Next, demonstrate the various techniques and materials you use in presenting different subjects. Parents need to understand the purposes of these various techniques—which may be very different from the ones they experienced as students—and how these relate to what is known about how young people learn. Also, point out what educational resources are available and who can assist them in locating and using these. This will acquaint volunteers with what happens in the classroom and show them the areas in which they can reinforce your instruction.

At this time, volunteers should be given any special training they will need to assist you. In addition to showing parents how to operate audio-visual or duplicating equipment, discuss its many purposes in instruction. If parents will help in special education programs for young people with learning disabilities, teach them how to use remedial materials. Making overhead transparencies and other instructional aids will require some extra explanation to ensure that what is made can be

used to enrich your curriculum. The more preparation you can give parents outside the classroom—both now and during future in-service training sessions—the less time you will have to take from your planning and teaching activities.

Presenting Guidelines for Parents

As a final step in the orientation process, you should review what will be expected of parents in terms of behavior and attitudes. To help you present the following guidelines clearly, a set of overhead transparencies (with suggested narration) entitled *Basic Guidelines for Parent Volunteers* is included in the Parent Involvement Series.

- *Respect school policies:* Parents' actions should be guided at all times by the role outlined for them, and they should learn and carefuly adhere to school goals, policies, and procedures. This is also true in the classroom. Parents build on the efforts of the school and the teacher; they help motivate students, but teachers initiate learning activities designed to accomplish specific goals. Instruct your volunteers not to cover additional material or assign work you have not called for. Also caution parents not to ask students to do anything which is contrary to school rules or which is physically dangerous, such as climbing on a chair to close a window.
- *Give students appropriate encouragement:* Parents can help greatly by giving students opportunities to make decisions and express their creativity.
- *Discipline is the teacher's responsibility:* Just as you are responsible for instructing students, you are ultimately responsible for maintaining discipline standards in your classroom—even if the parent's own child is involved. Parents should maintain order when assisting students in assigned activities and enforce rules only as you specifically instruct them. All disciplinary problems should be referred to you immediately. Remind parents that unwanted behavior can be effectively discouraged by rejecting the behavior, not the individual student.
- *Follow education's code of ethics:* Stress the confidential nature of the parents' relationship with the school. Discussion of confidential matters and criticism of the professional staff, the pupils, or the parent involvement program and its participants are inappropriate outside the school. Instead, discuss your concerns with the professional staff. And encourage parents to do so, too. By acting in a professional manner, volunteers will earn the respect of both teachers and students.
- *Avoid evaluating students:* Young people learn through a progression of building up blocks of knowledge, and progress may be some time in coming. It is not the parents' responsibility to judge student competence, although they should keep you informed of progress or difficulties which students experience. Final evaluation of a student's learning must be done by you, the professional.
- *Get to know the students:* Perhaps the most important qualification for a parent volunteer is fondness for young people. The quality of the rapport parents establish with students will directly affect your success. Students must feel comfortable with parents, but volunteers should not try to win students' esteem from the teacher. The classroom is a place for cooperative efforts for learning, not for a popularity contest. Encourage parents to understand and accept students as they are, taking into consideration their backgrounds, values, and aspirations, which may be very different from those of their own families.
- *Give deserved praise:* In any activity a student will probably do something worthy of a compliment. But the praise must be genuine and deserved; students will recognize and resent both false praise and a condescending attitude. Parents can help students fulfill their needs to achieve and gain self-respect if criticism is replaced by positive remarks, patience, and kindness.
- *Provide motivation through individual attention:* Parents must encourage students if they are to reinforce your instruc-

tion. Explain techniques which they can use to maintain interest and stimulate students to ask questions and exchange ideas. Parents should emphasize their concern for young people by using each student's name in conversation, by giving everyone an opportunity to participate, and by helping each student be successful in some activity.

- *Be consistent and objective:* Parents' words and actions should always be consistent and objective. A sense of fair play is essential, and for this reason, they should avoid becoming emotionally involved with any student or spending more time with their own child. Parents should be equally concerned for all and never take sides in arguments between students.
- *Be honest with students:* It may be hard for a parent to admit not having the answer to a question. But a dishonest answer will lose a student's respect. An important value of the parent involvement program—parent-student interaction to increase the student's motivation and receptivity to learning—will be lessened if the student is unable to rely on the parent. Above all, parents should never make a promise to a student that they cannot fulfill.
- *Respect the student's privacy:* A student's homelife should not be discussed unless she/he brings it up. Probing questions will be resented and may cause the student to withdraw. If a student reveals something to a parent in confidence, this confidence should be kept unless it is something vital for the teacher to know—and even then, this situation must be handled very carefully so that the student does not come to distrust you or the parents.
- *Be a good listener:* Having someone to pay attention to their ideas is important to students. Parents should be relaxed, unhurried, and attentive; they should also learn how to be comfortable with silences, giving students a chance to think and organize what they want to say.
- *Be an effective volunteer:* If parents need information or instruction, if they want to discuss a problem they cannot handle, or if they wonder whether they are effectively helping you and the students, you are there to assist them. They should not be afraid to ask if they do not understand what they are to do, or if they feel they need their duties changed. You should see that they feel comfortable coming to you for help—that they are not afraid you will criticize their efforts. In return, parents should avoid criticizing teachers or the school in both the classroom and the community. They should encourage students to have positive attitudes toward school and teacher, and thus they must not be critical of the educational system in an attempt to identify with the students. If parents question the value of your methods or actions, ask them to discuss it with you private.
- *Share ideas with the teacher:* Besides keeping you informed of the results of their classroom activities which you have assigned, parents should feel free to present their own ideas or suggestions. They may provide valuable new perspectives; let them know that you welcome their constructive comments about the educational program.
- *Be thoroughly prepared:* Stress that parents must fully understand the purpose of and the way to carry out each of their duties. If they are not prepared for an activity, students will not benefit from it as much as they might. While adequate preparation for classroom activities—with your help and guidance—may require a little more time or effort from your parents, remind them that this is a vital part of the volunteer's responsibility to the school, the teacher, and the students.
- *Get the most out of your involvement:* If parents are relaxed and natural with students, both will benefit from their new experiences. Encourage parents to view your parent involvement program as a way to learn new skills, make new friends, and improve their community through the schools.

- *Maintain a sense of humor:* Students appreciate adults who can laugh—with others and even at themselves. Education is not only a serious matter, but also a process that is personally fulfilling. And it allows students to express themselves in new, creative, and exciting ways. Not every problem can be treated lightly. What seems to be an amusing incident to an adult may be a major catastrophe to a student's sensitive ego.
- *Calm is best:* Students, particularly younger ones, are easily excited by any break in their usual routine. Parents can be a calming influence in any unusual or emergency situation by knowing what to do and where to get help if it is needed.
- *Your attitude is important:* Parents should leave personal problems at home; they should avoid discussing personal concerns or family life with both staff and pupils. Their volunteer work should have the understanding and approval of their families, or they may have difficulties in meeting their obligations.
- *Keep your commitment:* If a parent cannot come, ask her/him to notify you immediately so you can adjust your schedule. On the other hand, be sure to call volunteers promptly if you will not be needing them as scheduled—their time is valuable, too. If you must be absent, let parents know whether they will work with your substitute teacher (be sure to tell your substitute what volunteers should do), help another regular teacher, or not come at all that day. Parents will be expected to participate for the complete phase of the program to ensure that the students receive maximum benefits and to facilitate planning. Of course, unforeseen circumstances may cause a parent to leave the program. Emphasize that you understand these difficulties and that such a withdrawal would not mean the parent could not rejoin your program at a later date. The important factor to stress is that the students will come to expect the extra attention parents provide and will be disappointed if this attention ends suddenly.

In concluding the formal orientation session, try to answer any parent questions honestly. But if you are just beginning your program, you will probably have to admit there are many answers you don't have yet. You might want to plan future meetings with parents during the program to handle such questions; after they have been involved in the school situation, they may also need further information or instruction. Orienting and training parents should be a continuous process. A reference library of articles, books, and pamphlets of interest to volunteers might be organized—perhaps by the volunteers themselves—to give parents a place to find information on parent involvement or education in general.

If parents have not yet been assigned to help specific staff members, do this now. If at all possible, these assignments should be determined in advance—based on teachers' requests and parents' expressed desires to help in specific areas—and announced at the orientation session. Then take a few minutes to get acquainted with your volunteers (parents may have volunteered in response to a call from your volunteer coordinator or a general letter from the school) and briefly discuss future plans—e.g., working schedule, responsibilities, training sessions, etc. Finally, allow time for volunteers to get to know one another. This provides an opportunity for them to set up car pools, arrange to share baby-sitting duties, or just discuss their views of parent involvement—thus giving them a sense of cohesiveness and cooperation.

PARENTS AT WORK

Orienting Your Students

After the planning and parent preparation, your volunteers are now ready to help you. However, there is one important step before parents come into your classroom—explaining the program to the students. Some students will already know their parents are coming to work at school—but they and their classmates probably do not know why. Explain why the parents will be there and how parents can help them learn in school as well as at home. Your class will also feel more involved if you show them how they can help parents by

introducing them to friends or by showing them where classroom supplies are kept. Emphasize to your students that the parents deserve the same respect that you do as a teacher.

Establishing Your Classroom Routine

The group orientation which your volunteers have experienced is, of course, important, but it cannot replace teacher-parent interaction and preparation. When the parents come to your classroom for the first time, give them an opportunity to observe and to get acquainted with the students, the classroom itself, and your daily routine. This should not take more than one or two visits. As soon as parents feel self-confident, involve them in class activities immediately or they will lose interest. While initial observation is valuable, they will learn far more by actually participating.

Your program should allow parents as well as students to gain self-respect, so make every effort to give each volunteer work which will be accomplished successfully and which will stimulate personal growth through challenging experiences; again, this requires you to have a thorough knowledge of the skills, experiences, interests, and needs of your volunteers—who will have strengths and weaknesses just as your students do. Keep beginning parent activities informal and simple enough to ensure their success—probably involving each parent with only one or two students. Do not let parents try to do too much at once; they may feel inadequate if they cannot get everything done, and such frustration will be discouraging. As parents gain skill and confidence and feel more secure—primarily through your support and help—they can gradually be placed in more complex learning situations. Encourage volunteers to accept new responsibilities when they are ready, to try new methods and skills, and to meet new challenges. If possible, give parents a chance to try out their own ideas—with your prior approval.

As your program becomes more established, your own classroom organizational pattern will emerge. During your advance planning sessions with parents, you may want to assign them specific activities to be completed at certain times. If you prefer a more informally structured situation, you may want to create a "job box," recording necessary activities on slips of paper for parents to choose as they complete each job during their prearranged working hours. The important thing to keep in mind when planning is that volunteers should have a definite scheduled time to work and should take part in activities which will use this time to the best advantage.

A volunteer parent "journal" can be a useful tool for parent and teacher. If parents record what activities they have completed, along with their comments, you will know better how parents are doing, what subject areas need more emphasis or which students need special help, and whether parents have too much or too little to do. On this basis, you can tailor your program to better meet your students' and your parents' needs, as well as your own.

While much of the material here relates to the parent as a regular volunteer in the school, keep in mind that parents can also serve as resource persons on an occasional basis. Parents with special talents or experiences can enrich almost any subject area if their skills are utilized effectively. Discuss a parent's presentation with her/him in advance to make sure it is appropriate for your classwork and for the grade level of your students. Also, find out if any special equipment or assistance will be needed so you will be prepared when she/he arrives in the classroom. Plan introductory lessons, which will acquaint the students with the material the parent will present, as well as follow-up activities to reinforce what they have learned and to relate this to your current lessons.

However you involve parents in the classroom, you will now have more time for planning learning activities and working with students. This newfound time should be used to the fullest advantage; avoid relying too heavily on volunteers or becoming remote from your students. You should never use the program as a means of shifting responsibility for problem students to someone else.

Helping Your Volunteers

Even routine jobs can become important to volunteers if they understand how their tasks will help the school as a whole. Discuss with parents the purpose of what they are doing and why it is important. If you carefully consider the importance and purpose of each activity as you prepare

to explain it to parents, your planning should result in more useful and relevant parent participation, and eliminate "busywork" jobs.

Explain each task which you assign to a parent volunteer carefully, adapting your instructions to the type of activity. Obviously, making a chart will take more explanation than distributing art supplies. Provide samples of work, if possible, or demonstrate the task to be performed. In any event, cover all the details parents must know and answer questions clearly. Assuming parents should "know" something which is very familiar to you may result in time spent doing a job incorrectly. If your program is to really benefit the students, this instruction should take as little class time as possible. For this reason, ask volunteers to arrive a few minutes early or to allow some time during lunch or after school for planning and preparation.

After parents begin their actual work, they will be under your direction and will need some supervision to see that they are following instructions and that lesson objectives are being achieved. Your observations will also tell you when parents are ready to participate in more advanced activities and when they are experiencing difficulties which need your attention. However, this supervision need not be so constant that it makes the parent feel uncomfortable or takes time away from your own responsibilities.

While you should be available at all times to answer parents' questions and help solve problems, schedule occasional individual conferences and group discussions (sometimes with your principal) to review program results, establish goals for future activities, and exchange ideas. This will keep the program running smoothly and prevent minor problems from growing. For example, if a parent has a high absence rate or if her/his behavior is not always appropriate to the situation, discuss this tactfully with the individual. They may not always realize that they are not acting in the best interest of the students and will usually appreciate your advice—if it is offered in a constructive and friendly way.

Also, try to keep parents up to date on school occurrences and developments in the educational program. They are obviously interested in your school and will feel more involved if you share this information with them. Many school systems hold regular informal coffees for teachers and volunteers to foster better communication and cooperation.

Increasing Parent Involvement

If your initial efforts in involving parents are producing desired results, you may want to expand your program. You can contact additional volunteers (who would go through the same orientation as present volunteers). If you hold workshops to recruit new parents, let your working volunteers present their stories and encourage others to participate. You can also utilize those volunteers you have in new ways to produce a more student-oriented curriculum. You will benefit most from volunteers' assistance if you continue to help them improve their skills by attending relevant faculty meetings and in-service workshops.

As your program grows, a volunteer coordinator—whether principal, vice-principal, counselor, teacher, paid paraprofessional, or parent volunteer—will be beneficial and, in fact, may have a definite effect on your overall success. Such a coordinator should be carefully selected by the school staff to work closely and meet regularly with the staff and the volunteers. Your coordinator should be, above all, tactful and patient, and have the time to devote to keeping the program running effectively. She/he can maintain reference files on present and potential volunteers; assist during orientation sessions; help recruit parents and arrange working schedules, so as to find the right parent for each job; coordinate baby-sitting or transportation; keep attendance records and other forms for each parent; call in stand-by volunteers in case parents cannot come as scheduled, inform volunteers if they will not be needed on assigned days, and replace parents who must leave the program; maintain records on, and schedule resource persons; organize in-service learning opportunities; listen to parents' suggestions or problems; maintain a collection of resource materials to aid volunteers; help with program evaluation by questionnaire, discussion, or interview; handle correspondence related to the program; compile informational materials for teachers, volunteers, and those interested in learning more about your program; arrange for speakers to tell community groups about your program; prepare periodic reports on your program's progress; and help the school express its appreciation to the volunteers, individually and as a group. Because the coordinator is a liaison between volunteer and teacher, she/he can be partic-

ularly helpful in discussing problems in parent behavior and the like, when such might be resented or misunderstood coming from the teacher.

Expressing Your Appreciation

A final tip in working with parent volunteers—it is extremely important to let your parents know constantly just how much you appreciate the time and effort they are contributing, not simply because it allows you to be a more effective teacher, but also because it means so much to the students they are working with. In addition to personally telling them this, some schools have held dinners or parties honoring parents, introduced them at assemblies or school programs, mentioned them in school newsletters or community newspapers, or presented them with pins or certificates. Volunteers also would welcome thank-you notes from your pupils, written either as a class or individually. Happy and successful volunteers are your best public relations representatives for the parent involvement program by encouraging others to take part and by supporting the school's efforts to provide a better education for all students.

EVALUATING YOUR INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

At certain times, the progress of your parent involvement program should be assessed—by the teachers, principal, parents, administrators, outside observers, and even students. The administrators and the principal will be particularly concerned that the program is meeting the goals established for it—since they are expected to advocate and clarify the school's programs in the community. Consider the structure of your program as well as its content—is the time the staff puts in justified by the performance of the volunteers and the students? If your program is not meeting its goals, some replanning may be necessary, or perhaps more realistic short-term goals are needed. Observations by visiting instructional specialists will provide useful new perspectives in evaluating your results.

As a teacher, decide if instruction is really more individualized, if you have more time for professional work, if parents really help you to be a more effective teacher. Assess your own reactions to the program now that it is in operation, and whether you are comfortable directing and working with parents. You may find that you will need to spend more time planning for and with parents or establishing relationships more conducive to cooperation and communication.

Evaluate each parent in terms of attitude, acceptance of responsibility, willingness to learn new skills, receptivity to constructive suggestions, and ability to work with both students and school personnel. Also consider the success of your volunteers—whether they have good rapport with students, what areas they are most and least helpful in, and so forth. If a parent does not work well in a room with her/his own child or if an individual's personality is not suited to your classroom situation, new duties may have to be assigned.

Ask participating parents if they feel overutilized or underutilized and whether they feel they are receiving enough instruction to carry out their responsibilities. Encourage parents to examine their own performance in light of the objectives they have set for themselves. They should consider their preparation for activities, their concern for each student's particular needs, their success using various techniques, their attitudes toward and relationship with you, their fulfillment of the volunteer role, and their adherence to program policies. Then offer suggestions on what might be done differently—by you as well as by the parent—in the future. As a result, you may have to reschedule activities or provide more guidance.

Parents may find that they are happier in a very specific learning situation—e.g., some parents are more comfortable reading with one student, while others want to organize creative dramatic exercises or supervise playground activities. Again, these feelings will have important implications in your planning for parents. If parents do not think there is increased communication with the teacher, you will both have to put extra effort into creating the best relationship possible. By seeking volunteer viewpoints, you again emphasize that parents are personally developing along with the program which they are helping the school to create.

The students might be asked for their reactions to the new adults and the new classroom activities, or your own observations can provide a key to their opinions. Whether they appear happy with volunteer parents or bored or confused is a good indicator. Nonparticipating parents might also be asked if their children have made any comments about the program at home.

As your program continues, looking at your volunteer turnover is a good way to measure your success. If many volunteers leave, either because of expressed complaints or without explanation, reassess the effectiveness of each stage of your program to see where the reasons for dissatisfaction lie. If teachers who did not want volunteers originally remain uninvolved or if participating teachers decide to stop using volunteers, make an effort to find out why they feel parents are ineffective or unnecessary. On the other hand, if the number of volunteers is increasing and more teachers are asking to participate, all your planning and preparation have probably provided a good foundation on which your program can grow and develop.

Evaluation of your parent involvement program may take the form of written reports, questionnaires, individual conferences, or group dis-

cussions. Whatever mechanisms are employed for observation and feedback, they should not entail a lot of paper work, particularly for the teachers, or you will be defeating your whole purpose. Emphasis should be on action for improvement and growth rather than on precise statistical tables of results which may or may not be valuable in future planning.

If your program is to succeed, it must be flexible enough to allow for changes which periodic evaluations indicate are needed. Continuing workshops and discussion sessions involving parents, teachers, principal, and administrators will facilitate an exchange of experiences and ideas—an exchange resulting in increased learning for those involved and in an educational program better designed to grow and meet the needs of individual students.

It cannot be stressed too often that the parent involvement program will be your program and it must evolve from the needs of your school. These guidelines can only provide basic direction and stimulate your own creativity. It is your realization of the parent potential in your community that will mean a richer and more meaningful educational experience for all students.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

This list of activities which you may assign to parents presents a wide range of possibilities—here divided into several categories, depending on whether your volunteers are working individually or with you, the students, other school personnel, or parents.

The first category—individual work—is separated into general and clerical duties which parents may perform.

General duties

Research and compile instructional materials—books, pamphlets, newspaper and magazine articles and pictures, etc.—in a clip file for teacher reference or classroom use

Compile a guide of possible field trips, community resources, guest speakers, and available programs, plays, or displays; make arrangements for any of the above with teacher approval

Arrange decorations or food for class parties; prepare special holiday programs

Operate various types of projectors, tape recorder, record player, or other audiovisual equipment used in the classroom; attend to maintenance and storage of such equipment

Check out and return equipment borrowed from other classrooms or school facilities

Organize and maintain classroom library

Make or mend books, posters, workbooks, learning games or toys, etc., used by students

Make graphs, charts, maps, flash cards, overhead transparencies, and similar items for classroom presentations

Prepare various remedial or supplementary materials for students needing special help

Make picture-word cards for basic foreign language instruction; translate plays and other materials for bilingual instruction projects

Make puppets for story telling

Record filmstrip narrations, stories, and drills

Put assignments or lessons on the board

Arrange bulletin boards and other displays; dismantle and file materials for future use

Distribute books, school notices, and instructional materials

Prepare, distribute, and collect art materials—e.g., paper, paints, paste, crayons, and scissors

Set up materials (charts, maps, etc.) for teacher presentations

Adjust heating or cooling, window shades, and lights in classroom as necessary

Help move classroom furniture for special activities and return to orginal arrangement

Clean up art or science tables or other classroom work areas

Clean boards, desks, tables, and storage areas for books and other supplies

Clerical duties

Assist during school registration

Prepare school and federal attendance forms

Take attendance and follow up on school absences

Keep class records, statistical reports, federal or state reports, health information, etc.

Alphabetize materials for various school files

Write notes to parents

Collect and record money for milk and lunches; books and other school materials; insurance; field trips and class parties; magazines, newspapers, and class pictures; bank deposits and fund-raising projects; and charity drives

Inventory classroom books, equipment, supplies, and instructional materials

Requisition school supplies

Order and process books, filmstrips, films, overhead transparencies, posters, and free materials

Mark objective tests and workbooks for teacher's review

Score, graph, record, and average test scores and other grades

Enter names on report cards and transfer grades

Distribute, collect, and file report cards

Type stencils for homework, special worksheets, and class handouts

Duplicate and collate classroom materials

Type, proofread, and duplicate classroom or school newspaper

File student work

File resource materials for specific instructional units

Actual work with students will probably be the most rewarding for your volunteers. Try to involve them in at least one of the following types of classroom activities during each visit.

Help small children with coats and boots
Take new students on a tour of the building
Help students of other ethnic backgrounds adjust to the school situation and the classroom
Serve as a "foster parent" for students who are bused to the school from another area
Lead small-group discussions
Help with handwriting exercises
Write down stories or autobiographies which children dictate
Assist with creative writing activities, such as helping students write and illustrate their own books
Help students grade their own papers
Assist in using educational toys and games
Read stories to and with groups or individuals
Assist with creative dramatics, crafts, and art and music activities
Give drills or reviews in mathematics, phonics, spelling, etc., using flash cards or other materials
Aid students with science experiments, art projects, or other special activities
Help students make costumes or scenery for plays
Assist individuals or groups with enrichment instructional projects, independent study, or follow-up work
Help students with seatwork during study periods
Check to see that students understand and are following directions for classroom activities
Assist with special tutoring or remedial work
Help students plan and arrange bulletin boards or displays
Supervise rest periods
Direct student clean-up after activities
Monitor class in the absence of the teacher
Supervise peripheral groups while the teacher works with others
Give special instruction in hobbies or crafts
Serve as a resource person, talking to the class about occupations, travel experiences, or other areas where they have special knowledge; show slides or special collections; take students on special tours; give performances in the arts
Supervise after-school parties or club meetings
Solve minor discipline problems under direction of the teacher

There are also many areas of activity outside the classroom where parents can help the teacher and the students, as well as other school personnel.

Order, process, catalog, and shelve books for the library or materials for the media center, language lab, etc.
Mend library books; straighten shelves
Help students check out library books or find reference materials
Check on overdue library books
Operate equipment in the media center or language lab; help students use equipment properly; route equipment to classrooms
Help speech therapist with correctional drills
Assist in the counseling office
Work in health office giving minor first aid, calling parents if necessary, helping with inoculation programs and eye and hearing tests, and weighing and measuring students
Supervise collection and distribution of clothing for the needy
Operate lost and found unit
Set up hall displays
Monitor halls, doors, and playgrounds to maintain school security
Supervise students in the cafeteria, rest rooms, playground, or auditorium
Work in the school office typing, answering telephones, putting mail in teachers' boxes, etc.
Supervise physical education activities
Help students board buses
Assist teacher on field trip
Help with assembly programs
Make signs to direct visitors to guest parking areas or school meeting rooms
Act as assistant host or hostess for school open houses or meetings; greet guest speakers or other school visitors; write thank-you notes to those who have performed a service for the school
Arrange tours of the school or observations of the parent involvement program
Perform custodial duties in hall, rest rooms, or faculty lounges

While parents will spend a proportionately small amount of time working alone with you, they will be able to give you much valuable knowledge about their families and the community.

Serve as the teacher's interpreter with a non-English-speaking parent
Provide background information on their own children
Inform the teacher of any problems observed among students
Assist in planning activities such as field trips
Help with informal evaluations of new curriculum materials
Tell the teacher of community problems or special needs
Increase the teacher's understanding of ethnic groups within the community

Finally, parents can help you by the contacts they have with other parents—in school and during their daily lives as community residents.

Set up conferences and home visits with parents
Greet parents who visit the school
Baby-sit for preschool children while their parents visit the school
Organize parents for special projects
Act as interpreter for non-English-speaking parents; lessen cultural gaps in the community
Translate school notices for non-English-speaking parents
Encourage other parents to join the parent involvement program
Serve as liaison between school and community; explain school programs and services to community members; create greater understanding and communication

SUGGESTIONS FOR A WORKSHOP

The idea is simple: Learning and teaching are just too important to be left to teachers along—or for parents to be left out. *Together*, parents and teachers can help each other to help students.

Parents are now demanding to be involved. Teachers, in turn, need parents. Teachers and parents, in fact, *are* working together in many schools. Teachers have invited parents to help them do a variety of educational tasks: work as teacher aides, assist with the health program, or tutor under teacher supervision.

But parents also want to be involved in helping make decisions in other areas: in English, in ethnic group study courses, or in developing drug abuse education programs.

Parents and teachers also need each other in working on such major educational issues as accountability. In the past, however, each has not always understood or perceived the other's role. The purpose of the Teacher–Parent Workshop, therefore, is to clarify roles—to be able to work better together.

TEACHERS NEED PARENTS—PARENTS NEED TEACHERS. STUDENTS NEED BOTH.

THE TEACHER-PARENT INVOLVEMENT WORKSHOP

What is this workshop?

A two-hour interchange of experience of parents and teachers to find out how each sees the role of the other and then to plan to work together on common problems.

Who can sponsor the workshop?

Any education association, parent-community group, or building faculty.

How many can attend?

From as few as a dozen or so to a group of several hundred.

What equipment is needed?

Magic markers, 3"x5" index cards, 2 rolls of masking tape, newsprint pads. An overhead projector is useful for larger audiences.

HOW TO HOLD A TEACHER-PARENT INVOLVEMENT WORKSHOP

(Instructions for the Workshop Leader)

The Teacher-Parent Involvement Workshop is a training program designed to sensitize teachers and parents to common needs. It is designed to help each group more accurately understand why the other group often thinks and acts as it does.

Time—Two hours

Participants—An equal number of parents and teachers, each group sitting together at separate tables (in the same room)

What else—Coffee or soft drinks if possible

STEP I.

A. Explain that this workshop is a meeting of parents and teachers for each group to learn to know the other better.

B. On separate sheets of newsprint write the following headings with a large magic marker:
   1. What I think teachers should be held accountable for
   2. What I think parents should be held accountable for
   3. What I think that parents think teachers should be held accountable for
   4. What I think that teachers think parents should be held accountable for
   5. What I as a parent think teachers think about me
   6. What I as a teacher think parents think about me

C. Hang sheets 1, 4, 5 on top of each other near parents and hang sheets 2, 3, 6

together on the opposite wall near teachers. Expose sheets 1 and 2.

D. 1. Ask for three volunteers from each group.
   2. Ask the first volunteer for parents to elicit one-word descriptions of B1, above, from parents. (These words might be *discipline, learning, attitude.*)
   3. Ask the first volunteer for teachers to elicit one-word descriptions of B2, above, from teachers. (These words might be *support, cooperation, discipline.*)

E. After 10 minutes stop each group. Ask the second volunteer for parents to elicit words on B4 and write these words on the newsprint. Ask the second volunteer for teachers to do the same thing for B3.

F. After 15 minutes ask the third volunteer for parents to elicit and write words on B5. Ask the third teacher volunteer to do the same for B6. (The words might be *overbearing, intelligent, impossible.*)

G. After 10 minutes, move sheet 4 to the teachers' side next to sheet 2. Move sheet 3 to the parents' side next to sheet 1.

STEP II.

A. 1. Select a new volunteer from each group to lead a 15-minute discussion based on the words on the sheets.
   2. Ask each volunteer to circle words that are the same.
   3. Point out the differences as well as the similarities in the words that were chosen.

B. Select two or three participants to summarize what this experience has meant to them. Then give your own summary.

STEP III.

A. Mix teachers and parents in equal numbers at each table. Put fresh newsprint sheets on each table.

B. 1. Select one parent and one teacher as cochairperson for each table.
   2. Write on a separate sheet of newsprint: "What parents and teachers at this table agree can be done together: a plan of action."

C. After 20 minutes, ask each table cochairperson to place that group's sheets on a wall and report its findings to the total group.

STEP IV.

A. Summarize the experience and collect all the sheets.

B. Drink the rest of the coffee or soft drinks.

C. Prepare a written summary of the plan of action and determine the appropriate distribution of the document.

What is the next step?

1. Suggest the appointment of a Committee on Teacher-Parent Involvement in your local assocation and/or parent-community group.
2. Suggest the Teache -Parent Involvement Workshop as action that the Committee can carry out.
3. Use the two pages on "How To Hold a Teacher-Parent Involvement Workshop" to help the Committee hold the workshop.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

The following discussion-starter questions, designed for use at both teacher and parent-teacher workshops, will stimulate thought and interest, and point up what advantages parent involvement will provide.

Questions for Parents and Teachers

1. What does "parent-teacher partnership" mean to you?
2. How can you identify parents and teachers to participate in such a program?
3. More than likely there are existing parent involvement programs within your school system or in nearby communities. Are there volunteers who would like to form a committee to—
   a. Locate existing programs in the area?
   b. Arrange for visits to observe such programs?
4. Teachers and parents will volunteer to participate in a program; however, what considerations, if any, should be given to personality traits, community involvement, adult-child relationships, and potential regarding professional development of those who wish to participate?
5. The roles of all those involved—children, parents, teachers, principals, and school boards—should be defined so as to be completely understood. How can this be done?
6. What suggestions do you have for coordinating a parent involvement program?

Question for Parents

1. How do you feel about a parent involvement program in your child's classroom and school?
2. As parents, what specific needs do you recognize within your child's school that you can assist in meeting?
3. How can parents be involved in the orientation and planning sessions for parents?
4. What ideas or suggestions do you have for involving other parents who might not be aware of this program?
5. Recognizing that all parents wanting to participate would not be able to work effectively in a team situation with a teacher for many reasons, what other areas are there in the school where parents can become involved?
6. Special talents and interests need to be explored. What are your talents and interests, and what role might you wish to play?

Questions for Teachers

1. What specific deficiencies can you identify within your classroom and school that would be corrected by the development of a parent-teacher program?
2. How can parents be identified who wish to assist and/or who have special talents to contribute?
3. Good communication should be developed among parents, teachers, and principals. How can this be achieved?
4. What types of additional parent workshops or in-service training sessions should be planned beyond the initial orientation?
5. Teachers and parents may design a project such as childrens' dictating stories to parents? How can the teacher follow up such activities?

In leading such a discussion, encourage your fellow teachers and your pupils' parents to present their opinions and ideas—for this is the only way you can develop a parent involvement program which meets the needs of your school.

APPENDIX: Resource Materials

THE PARENT CRUNCH
WHAT SHOULD THE TEACHER DO?

This incident, "The Parent Crunch," and the teacher reactions which follow it deal with the affective dimension of teaching and may stimulate further thinking and discussion on this aspect of teaching.

"The Parent Crunch," adapted from a film of the same name, is one of a school television series (The Heart of Teaching) *designed to be used with teacher groups to stimulate discussion and exploration of teachers' problems. The series is the latest project developed by a consortium of educational and broadcasting agencies in the United States and Canada under the direction of the Agency for Instructional Television, an American-Canadian organization with headquarters in Bloomington, Indiana.*

Margaret Paslowski was worried. That was the trouble with teaching: you couldn't walk out and forget the day's concerns at four o'clock. She felt certain that right this minute Sandy McNaughton was getting hell from his father for bringing home a report card that did not meet Mr. McNaughton's expectations. Just this morning, Sandy had flashed his winning smile and confided, "He gives me a quarter for every A."

Margaret wished she understood Sandy's problem. Very likely, it had something to do with his mother's death last year. At any rate, Mr. McNaughton was obviously putting a lot of pressure on the boy. It appeared that he was doing a lot of Sandy's homework, too. Sandy's homework papers were perfect. But the fractions he seemed to have mastered the night before were somehow forgotten when he entered the classroom. He'd stand for minutes, nervously smudging out numbers on the chalkboard, frantically trying all kinds of processes in the hope of chancing on the right answer.

Margaret made a mental note to arrange a conference with the father for next week.

Very early the next morning, however, Mr. McNaughton stormed into Margaret's classroom, demanding an explanation for Sandy's grades.

Margaret began by mentioning the discrepancy between Sandy's homework and his classwork. But Mr. McNaughton refused to accept Sandy's spelling test scores, even with the papers right in front of him. "That's impossible!" he exclaimed. "Sandy knew those words cold. I drilled him on them. We—he worked on them a long time."

Recognizing a dead end, Margaret changed the subject, remarking that Sandy's reading's was on grade level.

"If his reading's good, why did you give him a C in reading?" Mr. McNaughton angrily inquired.

"Many factors go into a reading grade," Margaret replied calmly. "Sandy has read very few books during the grading period. . . ."

"He reads at home all the time," Mr. McNaughton interrupted. "We read together—books, magazines, newspaper articles."

Mr McNaughton was no more willing to consider Sandy's difficulties with math than he had been with spelling and reading. When Margaret pointed out the still-smudged chalkboard, where Sandy had struggled desperately with fractions the day before, the father launched a personal attack, deriding her "disorganized" classroom.

At that moment, the bell rang, and eager children spilled into the classroom. "Please come to my desk, Mr. McNaughton," Margaret urged in a low voice. "we need to make an appointment for another conference. I know we can work out a plan."

But Mr. McNaughton refused to consider another conference. Instead, he went over to Sandy and spoke to him for a moment. Sandy shook his head "No" and looked unhappy. Mr. McNaughton then strode quickly from the classroom, went directly to the principal's office (Margaret learned later), and demanded that Sandy be transferred to the other fourth grade class.

Meanwhile, Margaret called her class to order and got them started on the day's activities. Soon, she was so engrossed that she was able to dismiss the unpleasant scene that had begun her morning. But at recess on the playground, the sight of Jean, Sandy's teacher last year, reminded her, and she sought her advice.

Jean, however, seemed reluctant to talk about Sandy McNaughton. She did admit, finally, that

she'd given him nearly straight A's—after the first report card when his father had come to her and read the riot act. "After all, Mrs. McNaughton had just died, and Sandy was only eight. I had to get the father off the kid's back for the rest of the year at least." The bell rang, ending recess; as Jean headed into the building, she concluded, "I just didn't think Sandy could take it, with both me and his father pushing on him"

Margaret turned around to lead her pupils back to class and discovered Sandy at her side, staring at her with concern and apprehension. And then, the loudspeaker blared: "Miss Paslowski, please come to the office. Miss Paslowski, please come to the office." She sent all of the children except Sandy to the classroom.

"Don't let them put me in the other fourth grade," he pleaded, close to tears. "I want to stay in your class, even if I'm not doin' so good."

"Don't worry," Margaret said, as it dawned on her what Mr. McNaughton must have whispered to Sandy. "Your dad and I will work it out. We'll have a good year, I promise."

As Sandy ran off to join the others, Margaret turned and headed for the principal's office. Mr. McNaughton would be waiting for her there.

Reactions by Classroom Teachers

The most fundamental issue implicit in "The Parent Crunch" is how we, as parents and as educators, create larger problems when we "take the easy way out."

Margaret knew for some time that there was a discrepancy between Sandy's homework and classwork, yet she did nothing. Sandy told her that he was rewarded for A's, but she permitted him to take home a lackluster card without first calling his father. If she had called Mr. McNaughton first, showing genuine concern, she might have defused his anger. To ease Sandy's anxiety, Margaret promised him that everything would work out—a promise she may not be able to keep.

Mr. McNaughton frequently took the easy way out. He obviously did Sandy's homework, which prevented the boy from working and learning by himself. When Mr. McNaughton confronted Margaret, it was easier for him to blame her for Sandy's less-than-perfect report card and to say he would change Sandy's class than face the issues.

Jean was certainly the most guilty of taking the easy way out. Sandy's first problems with school started when he was in her class. His mother died, and his father tried to make him perform beyond his capabilities. Jean believed she had Sandy's best interest "at heart" when she gave him A's in order to get his father off his back, but she was, in reality, doing Sandy, his father, and Sandy's future teachers a great disservice. The problem inevitably grew, and Margaret had to cope with more ramifications than did Jean.

Answers to questions in education can be difficult. An old adage claims that most easy answers are neat, plausible, and wrong. The truth is that when we allow ourselves to take the easy way out, we make serious problems more difficult.

—**Ruth Granich**, *English teacher, Binford Middle School, Bloomington, Indiana.*

A film of this type raises many questions—questions that, because of the film's open-ended nature, evoke highly subjective answers. Although it would be presumptuous of me to attempt to prescribe cure-alls for teachers faced with problems similar to Margaret's, nevertheless, I offer a few ideas that might help the classroom teacher to avoid the pitfalls inherent in parent-teacher confrontations.

1. Early in the school year, encourage as many of your students' parents as possible to meet with you. What form the meeting takes is of minor consideration; the important thing is that parents have the opportunity to discuss school-related issues early in the year.
2. Schedule a workshop for parents. Include role playing as a means of tackling problems. Have parents look for alternative solutions to the problems.
3. Whenever possible, include parents in class-related projects as well as trips or excursions. These are perfect occasions for chats with parents.
4. When a problem seems to be developing with a particular student, make an informal telephone call to the parent.
5. Always seek the administrative and counseling services of your school when you face a potentially serious problem.

6. Finally, learn to identify situations that may explode into full-scale battles, in order that you may initiate effective preventive measures.

—**Hugo R. Garcia,** *sixth grade teacher, Public School No. 144, Forest Hills, New York.*

Our society places so much importance on academic achievement that very few parents can be realistic in accepting their child's school performance if it fails to reach their expectations, which often exceed the child's capabilities.

In our opinion, the situation dramatized in "The Parent Crunch" could have been avoided entirely if the teacher had had the sensitivity to deal with the child's needs immediately, faced the responsibility of communicating with the parent much sooner, and checked into the child's previous performance in the school.

By reassuring the father of her desire to share the responsibility of helping Sandy, Margaret could have relieved any guilt feelings Mr. McNaughton might have had and would have dampened his later feeling of indignation, for which there was some justification.

The sooner a teacher tunes in to a child's or parent's needs, the more cooperation he or she gets and the more motivated a child is to do better. Personal contact is essential to maintain the humanistic quality of teaching.

Margaret also neglected to use resources that could have proven most helpful. It certainly would have been wise to discuss the situation with the principal and guidance counselor. This would have put the principal in a position to support her and deal with the responsibility of Sandy's performance and class placement intelligently and unemotionally.

The school, the teacher, and the parent would have made a beginning. The lines of communication would have been opened and an honest effort made to help the parent understand the importance of continued communication.

—**Sandra Siegel,** *sixth grade teacher, Walter S. Boardman Elementary School, Oceanside, New York, and* **Annakaie Sodemann,** *retired teacher.*

Although Margaret Paslowski was obviously concerned about Sandy, I question some things she did—and some things she did not do—in dealing with him.

Why hadn't she ever talked to Jean, the third grade teacher, about Sandy? That, at the minimum, would have better prepared her for what was to happen. Also, why didn't she call for a parent conference with Mr. McNaughton before report cards were issued? Given an opportunity to discuss his son's schoolwork early in the year, he might not have been so hostile and might have been receptive to a cooperative plan to help his son.

Was Sandy working up to his ability? Might he not have been graded on effort as well as on achievement? Perhaps a plus for effort might have pleased his father.

Also, could Sandy benefit from tutoring? That might be an area to investigate if the father would allow it—and if he could be induced to stop his sad efforts at home tutoring.

I thought Miss Paslowski's reactions during the conference were just about ideal (calm, concerned, able to back up her ideas with evidence), as was her relationship with Sandy. But I was disturbed by the third grade teacher's solution to the problem.

While it was commendable of Jean to want Sandy to have a trouble-free school year, in contrast to an unhappy home situation, in my opinion, she acted most unprofessionally. Not only was she intellectually and morally dishonest, but she also set up both Sandy and his next teacher, who happened to be Miss Paslowski, for a difficult time. At the very least, she could have warned Miss Paslowski early in the school year of what she had done and explained why she had done it.

—**Frances Weinberg,** *fourth grade teacher, Child's Elementary School, Bloomington, Indiana.*

AN INNOVATIVE EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAM

By MARIAN K. BEEBE
Materials Developer, Parent-Child Early Education Program, Ferguson-Florissant School District, Ferguson, Missouri.

Recently, when I visited one of our Saturday School Centers, located in a kindergarten room in the St. Louis suburbs, it was bustling with activity. Some 20 children, clustered in fives around instructors, were intently engaged in a variety of tasks.

In one corner, five young fishermen were casting magnetic-tipped fishing lines into an imaginary pond to catch, then count, construction-paper fish. In another, a teacher was dicing vegetables into a soup kettle to brew a language lesson good enough to eat. To improve hand and eye coordination, a third group was taking turns tossing bean bags into the wide open mouth of a cardboard clown.

My attention returned to one young fisherman who was fishing without a pole. He ran his hand along the surface of the floor until he established contact with a fish. Then, thrusting it high for all to see, he broke out in what was undoubtedly the world's biggest smile. A little girl squealed excitedly, "Matt's caught another fish! Matt's caught another fish!"

This was indeed a spine-tingling experience. Matt, the class's only blind student, was being warmly accepted in the world of the sighted.

The presence of a handicapped child mainstreamed with the normal was only one of the rather unusual things about the class. Some others were the fact that school was in session on a Saturday, that the students were all four years old, and that the small-group instructors—with one exception—were all parents.

Matt and his classmates, along with 800 of their contemporaries, are enrolled in an innovative early education program called Saturday School. But the name is misleading. Saturday School is much more than school on Saturday.

Formally titled Parent-Child Early Education Program, it is a fresh approach to an age-old problem: how to increase a child's chances for success in school—and in society.

Reviewing quantities of research on the way children learn and develop during the early years convinced the program planners in the Ferguson-Florissant School District that it is essential to involve the parents. Proceeding on this premise, they conceived a program that teaches the parent as well as the child.

The program was initially funded under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Now it is supported locally with contributing funds from the State of Missouri Department of Special Education.

"The involvement of parents influences the program's structure and success more than any other single factor," reports Warren M. Brown, superintendent of the Ferguson-Florissant School District. "The child's education becomes a shared responsibility between home and school, parent and teacher."

When the program was launched five years ago, we anticipated a reluctance on the part of parents to join us. Parents were, after all, traditionally accustomed to leaving their children at the school door. We were requesting a portion of their time at home and on Saturdays, we were inviting ourselves into their homes, and we were having them work side by side with professionals.

Our skepticism was ill-founded. An average of 98 percent of the parents help at school at least once during the school year, and 78 percent contribute their fair share—five times a year. Program Director Marion Wilson recalls: "Frankly, we were amazed at the response. The fact that we enroll more than 75 percent of the four-year-olds living in the district is an indication in itself that parents are willing to become involved in their child's education."

Parents are thoroughly involved in every phase of the program's four parts. They take turns working at the half-day school sessions on Saturdays, participate in the teacher's once-a-week visits into the home, provide additional at-home learning experiences for their child during the week, and participate in the testing of their child at the start of the year.

The tuition-free program costs the district a modest $205 per child. It employs a part-time staff of certified teachers and teaching specialists, along

with consultants in learning disabilities and child psychology.

Preparing parents begins two weeks before school starts with an evening orientation meeting for both mothers and fathers. Teachers explain the program and outline in detail the part parents play, our expectations of parents, and the kind of help we supply.

Through-the-year training of parents is a continuing responsibility of every teacher and a built-in part of every contact with parents.

At the first-of-the-year screening, the mother looks on while the teacher tests her child. Each mother also fills out a checklist indicating her child's ability to perform a variety of cognitive and social skills, with a space for writing in any special needs or concerns.

Later, the teacher meets with the parent to report the test findings as a means of helping her understand her child's strengths and weaknesses and the areas, if any, that may require concentrated effort.

The teacher and parents then talk about what they can do together to help the child during the year. The partnership has begun. It is firmly cemented as they continue to work together at school and during home visits. To see how this works, let's follow Susan Barkley and her family through a week of their experiences related to Saturday School.

Susie comes to a half-day session at school every Saturday morning. About once every six weeks Susie's mother or father comes too, to teach a learning activity to a small group of students. Mrs. Barkley, like most parents, felt a little nervous the first time she came to teach. "But I soon got over it," she says. "It was all set up for me, so I could hardly go wrong."

(Teachers meet with each of the participating parents before the children arrive to demonstrate ways to gear the activity to the ability of each child. These lessons carry over into the work parents do at home with their own children.)

Susie joins two neighboring children for a one-hour teaching visit each week, which takes place on a rotating basis in one of the three homes. Mrs. Barkley and the other mothers, or the sitter if the mother works, join the children for the learning activities during the session. (Children with a special problem or handicap also see a teaching specialist once or twice a week.)

During the home visit, the atmosphere is relaxed and instruction is personalized. The setting is informal—on the floor, around the kitchen table, or outside under a shade tree.

To bridge the gap between school on Saturdays and the home visits, Susan's mother, with some help from dad and older brother Tad, introduces skill-developing games into Susie's everyday play. Their source for ideas? A "games" guide, which the teacher gives to Mrs. Barkley at each home-teaching visit. The teacher checks the activities that would particularly benefit Susan.

The program gives parents an opportunity to pick up the techniques a trained teacher uses in teaching and working with young children, and before too many weeks, they begin to imitate the teacher's model. As one experienced mother of 10 said, "Just watching the teachers work with the children is an education in itself."

From observing their child at work and play with other four-year-olds, parents grow aware of what a typical child that age can do. As a result, what they expect of their own child becomes more realistic. Depending on the child, they will begin to raise their expectations or lower them.

Parents will also begin to assess their child's development in a broad range of readiness skills. This is an excellent motivator for at-home teaching in areas where their child may need it.

Teachers, in turn, benefit from seeing the children in their homes. "It really helps me understand the children, and their parents, too, in a way that seeing them only in a classroom setting would not provide," says one veteran teacher. "When I see a child living in a house without a single magazine or newspaper or a child who is overindulged by a too accommodating mother or who is being severely scolded by a too strict or demanding parent, I get an insight into this child that I simply could not get any other way. This makes a lot of difference in the way I deal with the child—and the parent."

In case we have implied that fathers are seldom involved in the program, let us say that this is not necessarily so. The majority of the helpers are mothers, but the teachers all admit to feeling a little partial toward the fathers who help at Saturday School.

Most fathers arrive for their first teaching duty

looking as though they'd much rather be home cutting the grass. They are, after all, unaccustomed to working with little children—and that may even include their own! But one session is usually enough to convert them into ardent supporters and helpers.

Although fathers are involved at home considerably less than mothers, some pursue their school role with gusto. One inventive father, whose son has a serious lag in fine motor skills, duplicates every game the teacher brings into the home with embellishments of his own that are good enough to patent, like adding color-coding to a screw-into-the-board set.

Parents tell teachers that they had no idea how capable young children are. They just thought children sort of grew and in due course automatically learned what they needed to know. Involvement in the program has given parents a new awareness: Learning for children can take place anywhere, anytime.

A father of 12 whose youngest child is in Saturday School admits that when he was working around the house he "used to shoo the children away in the interest of their safety and his sanity." But now he makes a point of having his four-year-old son work alongside him on something he can do, adding, "We've really become better friends."

Surprisingly perhaps, mothers, who are with their children around the clock, report the same thing. A year of working with their children in Saturday School has resulted in a greater bond and a closer relationship.

The guiding hand in this program is the teacher, who must be competent to perform many roles: instructor, tester, evaluator, curriculum planner, teaching-team member, counselor, and partner and friend to parents. Consequently, the teacher-training program is intensive, thorough, and year-long.

Specialists and consultants conduct a two-week training course for teachers before school starts and lead weekly two-hour sessions during the year. The focus is on four-year-olds with emphasis on child development practices, working with parents, test administration, behavior-modification techniques, and appropriate learning activities that relate to a list of specific skills and objectives.

Teachers continually share information and insight with parents. "Whatever our psychologist says about child growth and development this week," reports one teacher, "I'll be using in my home visit next week. For example, I may explain that four-year-olds may be clumsy because they are at such a fast-growing age. They constantly have to make new adjustments for a longer leg or arm when they are reaching or walking."

Our first-year Saturday School students are now starting fourth grade. On their third grade achievement tests, they scored significantly higher on the total test battery and in all sub-areas except math than their control groups—children who had no preschool experience or who had other preschool experience.

This same pattern has appeared every year since they entered kindergarten except that last year was the first time they were not significantly ahead in math. Their counterparts who entered the Saturday School during its second year have similarly shown themselves to be significantly higher achievers than their control group classmates on the same battery of achievement tests.

In the third and final year of federal funding for Saturday School, a program validator, whose job was to determine whether our program was living up to its list of 44 objectives, commented to the taxi driver who was transporting him to our office, "I'm here in St. Louis to visit the Saturday School program in the Ferguson-Florissant School District. Have you ever heard of it?"

The driver responded, "Heard about it? I've even taught in it! And I can't say enough good things about it!" He raved on, nonstop, for some 28 minutes and 36 blocks. When the destination was reached, he closed with this clincher, "I gotta say one more thing. Because of this Saturday School, my little girl is not going to go through life being shy like her brother. Just being in this program has already made a difference—and it will every day of her life."

That, after all, is what this partnership is all about.

HELPING PARENTS WITH THEIR CHILDREN

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Many parents need help in dealing with their children and would welcome the chance to belong to a group organized for this purpose. But is it the school's responsibility to organize such groups? My answer is a firm Yes. Why? Because I have talked with parents who either cannot afford counseling services or who are timid about seeking them, and I realize our society offers very little in the way of parent training. The facts speak out clearly: If the schools close their doors to parents who are seeking help, these parents may not seek the help elsewhere.

Parents find that the support they receive from a group is most comforting. I have seen many a parent enter a group nervous and upset, then literally sigh with relief halfway through the meeting when he or she realizes that the other parents are having similar (or worse) problems with child rearing.

This realization is especially valuable to parents who are single or whose spouses are unsupportive. Valuable, too, is the opportunity a parent group may give a parent to help someone else. A mother who has spent her time going from one mental health center to another, wondering all the time just how disturbed she is, will find that helping someone else can be quite an ego booster.

For two years I worked as a "parent educator" for a university-affiliated agency. During that time I saw many parents grow in their abilities to understand their own feelings, to understand their children, to change their behavior and that of their children, and to relate to and help others. It's rewarding to see a parent slowly change from an unhappy, self-derogatory, and uncertain individual to one who is confident and proud and striving to help others feel the same.

When a school does opt to provide some parent services, flexibility is the key to success. In some schools, for example, counselors or social workers take on the parent program. In other schools, it's a teacher or a group of teachers. (I've seen principals and psychologists become quite involved as well.)

Ideally, the person to work with parents through the school should be someone who knows a lot not only about child rearing but also about education. This person should be a resource to teachers and parents alike. In the future, schools may hire "parent educators" for this express function.

I hope I haven't conveyed the impression that parents are beating at the doors of the school to get help, because sometimes parents are apathetic about joining groups. In fact, parent motivation can be a serious problem.

In order to get parents interested in a group, leaders might send them a brochure or newsletter with information about meetings and topics under consideration for discussion. Even if discipline is a primary concern in the school (which is likely), group leaders will want to announce other topics as lead-ins. Subjects that usually interest parents are child development, tutoring, health and medical concerns, new educational developments, mental retardation, autism, learning disabilities, and giftedness. Often, if only the group leaders can get parents to come out to one or two meetings, they become hooked and will join the group.

Some schools establish reinforcement systems to encourage parents to participate in these groups. A number reward parents (educational games for use with their children, say) for participation. Others provide parents with bus fare and pay for their babysitters. For many parents, a session with a counselor or teacher who gives them undivided attention may in itself be highly reinforcing.

Before the first meeting with parents, group leaders will need to plan their sessions carefully. They will also want to learn how to facilitate communication and keep the group on task. Since a few people may try to change the topic of the session, monopolize the conversation, or be hesitant to speak, leaders will find it helpful to anticipate strategies for redirecting the conversation or switching topics and for getting everyone in the group involved in the discussion.

While one article could not full prepare anyone

completely for work with parents, some guidelines should be helpful.

At the first meeting, leaders will want to do the following:

1. Give parents a chance to talk.
2. Provide an opportunity for them to establish, clarify, or modify the objectives for the group.
3. Assess parent and family strengths and weaknesses (a questionnaire may be helpful).
4. Informally assess skill levels of the parents in order to choose appropriate reading materials for individuals in the group.

Thereafter, leaders will find the group will progress smoothly if they remember a few rules.

1. Vary the tone and pace of the meetings, depending on the concerns and feelings of the group.
2. Don't be intimidated by the parents.
3. Don't impose goals on the group.
4. Don't assume people in the group are talking about the same behavior just because they use the same terms (unhappy, tantrums, threats, not communicating, etc.). Have people define their terms.
5. Don't give out magic solutions. Rather, help parents learn to weigh alternatives and to make decisions.
6. Transmit expertise and skills to parents.
7. Teach them a "process" so that later they can apply problem-solving techniques to new situations.
8. Give many concrete examples of the child-rearing techniques introduced in the class.
9. Pay attention to the successes the parents are having.
10. Help parents to become aware of the many positive things that happen with their children.

Of course, the list could go on and on. I frequently find it helpful to talk about the mistakes I have made with children. This lets parents know that I am human, too, and that making a mistake is not fatal.

I also point out the humor in many situations involving children. I find that humor, handled in the right way, can strengthen the interaction within a group as well as provide some relief from the intensity of the problems discussed.

Teachers, counselors, psychologists, or other school officials may have a group but feel unqualified to handle all the issues that come before them. These leaders should remember that they can be effective without providing answers for all problems. Sometimes parents simply crave a listener.

At times I have said to a parent, "I want you to try this. I've seen it work in the past and I really think it will work for you." I have also said, "Tell your husband (mother, wife, grandmother, aunt) that Dr. O'Connell, who has had lots of experience with children, says this will probably work and we should try it." And I have said, "I feel you should be talking to someone else—that's not my area of expertise." Then, sometimes I will listen to a complex problem and rephrase what the parent has said. Or I will ask the parent to observe the situation more closely for the next week.

Leaders in this sensitive area must remain flexible in the techniques and procedures they use with groups. Practice and experience make this easier and easier. But leaders shouldn't assume that they must always have a Band-Aid ready—that's not their job or responsibility. It is the school's responsibility, however, to help parents do a good job of rearing children.

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